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EARLY HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH IN BENGAL.

1633-1650.

96

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

ON THE

EARLY HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH IN BENGAL.

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CHAPTER I.

COMING.

Section I.—Orissa, 1633-1650.

[*Authorities.*—The chief authorities are Bruton's Voyage and Sir Henry Yule's edition of Hedges' Diary published by the Hakluyt Society. The other authorities are Bruce's Annals of the East India Company and Stewart's History of Bengal. The title of Bruton's Voyage runs: "NEWS from the EAST INDIES or a VOYAGE to BENGALLA.....WRITTEN BY WILLIAM BRUTON, now resident in the parish of *St. Saviour's Southwork*,.....and now lately came Home in the good Ship called *The Hopewel* of *London*.....Imprinted at London by I. Okes.....1638." It is reprinted in vol. ii. of a "COLLECTION OF VOYAGES and TRAVELS" published in 1745, and also in vol. v. of the enlarged edition of "Hakluyt" of 1809-12.]

The advance of the English from the Coromandel Coast to the Bay of Bengal, like the recent advances of the Russians in Asia, was primarily due to the enterprise of local officers. In March, 1633, the Company's Agent at Masulipatam, meeting with a growing scarcity of cloth in that place, resolved on sending out an expedition to open up trade with the fertile provinces at the mouth of the Ganges.[1] To us the enterprise may seem common place enough, but for the English of that day it was a wonderful and hazardous undertaking. Much, indeed, they had heard of the countries to which they were going, but they knew little. They distrusted the native inhabitants, they stood in awe of the high and mighty Mogul who had lately so terribly visited the Portuguese, and above all they dreaded those very Portuguese whose jealousy could brook no rivals. The history of this first coming of the English has therefore all the interest which

[1] "The first thinge (of Note) that was Acted after our Comings vnto this Coast." *Hedges' Diary*, iii, 178.

954
H673

attaches to new voyages of discovery and adventure. Let William Bruton, of the parish of St. Saviour's, Southwark, quarter-master of the good ship *Hopewel*, and one of the founders of the English trade in Bengal, begin the story in his own words.[2]

"The 22nd of *March*, 1632 [*i. e.*, 1633 N. S.], I being in the country of *Cormandell* with six *Englishmen* more, at a place called *Massalupatam*, a town of merchandize, Mr. *John Norris*, the agent there, was resolved to send two merchants into *Bengalla* for the settling of a factory there: and these six *Englishmen* (of the which I was one) were to go with the merchants, and withal to carry a present from the agent to the *nabob*, or *king* of that country, to obtain the promises that formerly he had granted to the *English* for traffic, and to be custom-free in those of his dominions and ports. Wherefore a *junk* was hired at *Massalupatam*, to be our convoy; and the said *junk* did belong unto those parts, and the names of the *Englishmen*, that were appointed for that voyage, were Mr. *Ralph Cartewright*, merchant, Mr. *Thomas Colley* second, *William Bruton*, *John Dobson*, *Edward Peteforde* *John Busby*, *John Ward*, and *William Withall*.

"Though we hired the aforesaid *junk*, *March* 22, yet it was the 6th of *April* following, before we could be fitted to depart from *Massalupatam*, and in much various weather with many difficulties and dangers (which to relate here would be tedious, and impertinent to my intended discourse); the twenty-first of *April*, being then *Easter-day* we were at anchor in a bay before a town called *Harssapoore* it is a place of good strength with whom our merchants hold commerce with correspondency. This twenty-first day in the morning Mr. *Ralph Cartwright* sent the money ashore to the governor of *Harssapoore* to take it into his safe keeping and protection until such time he came ashore himself. So presently there came a *Portugal* frigate fiercely in hostility towards us, but we made ready for their entertainment and fitted ourselves and the vessel for our best defences; but at last they steered off from us, and, upon our command, she came to an anchor somewhere near us, and the master of her came on board of us, who being examined whence she came and whither she was bound, to which demands he answered nothing worthy of belief as the sequel showed: for he seemed a friendly trader, but was indeed a false invader (where

[2] Bruton's Voyage.

4291

opportunity and power might help and prevail); for, on the 22 day, Mr. *Cartwright* went ashore to the governor of *Harssapoore*; and on the 24th day, the said master of the frigate and with the assistance of some of the ribble-rabble rascals of the town, did set upon Mr. *Cartwright* and Mr. *Colley*, where our men (being oppressed by multitudes) had like to have been all slain or spoiled, but that *Lucklip* the *rogger* (or vice-king there) rescued them with two hundred men. In this fray Mr. *Thomas Colley* was sore hurt in one of his hands, and one of our men much wounded in the leg and head; their *nockada*,[8] or *India* pilot, was stabbed in the groin twice, and much mischief was done and more intended, but by God's help all was pacified.

"The twenty-seventh day of *April* we took leave of the governor and town of *Harssapoore*. (I mean three of us); namely Mr. *Cartwright*, *William Bruton*, and *John Dobson*, leaving Mr. *Colley* and the four men with him, till news could be sent back to them from the Nabob's Court at *Cutteke* or *Malcander*, of our success and proceedings there, with our other goods: for he is no wise merchant that ventures too much in one bottom, or that is too credulous to trust *Mahometans* or *Infidels*. And having laden our small boats with the goods which were gold, silver, cloth and spices (of which spices those parts of *India* are wanting, and they almost are as dear there as in *England*), we passed some two leagues and a half in water. And after that the said goods were carried by land in carts, till we came to a great town *Balkkada*, but it was more than three hours after sun-setting, or late before we came thither.

"The twenty-eighth day of *April* in the morning, the governor of this town came and saluted our merchant, and promised him that whatsoever was in his power to do him any friendly courtesy he should command it: and indeed he was in every way as good as his word; for he lent us horses to ride on and cowlers (which are porters) to carry our goods; for at this town the carts did leave us and our goods were carried on men's shoulders; then we set forwards, being accompanied with the governor, with his music, which were shalms and pipes of sundry forms, much after the forms of waits or hautboys, on which they played most delicately out of tune, time, and measure. In this manner the governor with a great number of people, did bring

[8] Nakhudah (Pers.), a native skipper.

us about half an *English* mile out of town, where he courteously took his leave of us, but yet he sent his servants with us as guides, and that they might bring his horses unto him that he lent us.

"This day at the hours of between eleven and twelve of the clock, it was so excessively hot that we could not travel; and the wind blew with such a sultry scalding heat as if it had come from an oven or furnaces; such a suffocating fume did I never feel before or since: and here we were forced to stay near three hours till the sun was declined, we having happily got under the shadow of the branches of a great tree all that time. Then we set forward for the town of *Harharrapoore*: which in the space of two hours or a little more, we drew near unto. so we stayed awhile, till our carriages were come up together unto us; which done there met us a man who told us that his masters stayed our coming: then we speedily prepared ourselves for the meeting of so high esteemed a person: and, when we came to the town's end there he met us at a great *pagodo* or *pagod*: and just against that stately and magnificent building we were entertained and welcomed by one of the king's greatest noblemen and his most dear and chiefest favourite, who had a letter from the king his master and was sent from him to meet us and to conduct us to his court. The nobleman's name was *Mersymomeine*; he received us very kindly, and made us a very great feast, or costly collation, before supper; which being done we departed for our *surroy*, or inn, where we lay all night with our goods; but *Mersymomeine* stayed with his followers and servants in his and their tents at the *pagodo*.

"The twenty-ninth day of *April* we stayed at *Harharrapoore* and visited this great man; but the greatest cause of our staying was by reason of the nockada, or pilot, of the frigate, whose men affronted and hurt some of our men at *Harssapoore*; for this cause the frigate was stayed there, and the pilot of her came to this great man thinking by gifts to win him to clear his vessel; but he would not be allured by such rewards or promises, but told him that he must appear before the *nabob* and seek to clear himself there.

"The thirtieth day of *April*, we set forward in the morning in our way to the city of *Coteke*: it is a city of several miles in compass and it standeth a mile from Malcandy where the Court is kept: but Mr. *Cartwright* stayed behind and came after us accompanied by the

said nobleman: we went all the day on our journey till the sun went down; and then we stayed for our merchant, being eight *English* miles from *Coteke*: and about twelve or one of clock at night, they came where we were: so we hasted and suddenly got all our things in readiness, and went along with them; and about the time of three or four of clock in the morning, we came to the house of this *Mersymomeine* being *May-day*. Here we were very well entertained and had a great variety of sundry sorts of meats, drinks and fruits. About eight of the clock, *Mersymomeine* went to the court and made known to the king that the *English* merchant was come to his house. Then the king caused a great banquet to be speedily prepared and to be sent to the house of *Mersymomeine*, which banquet was very good and costly. Then about three or four of the clock in the afternoon, we were sent for to the court of *Malcandy*."

Cartwright and his party spent more than a week at this magnificent Court negotiating with the Nawab and being entertained by him. The Portuguese captain still pursued them with complaints about their conduct, but he was not listened to, while their own requests, owing to the kind offices of Mirzamumin were readily granted. They on their side promised to afford every kind of assistance to the people of Orissa in naval matters and to abstain from attacking any ship belonging to the natives of the country, or lying in their ports. The Nawab on his side formally promised, in writing, to allow the English to trade, buy, sell, export and transport, by land or by sea, either off or upon the shore, without paying any custom. He strictly enjoined that no governor or any other officer whatsoever should cause them to pay customs or duties; and he permitted the merchants to take ground and construct houses fitting their employment wherever they thought convenient. He gave them free license to build shipping, small or great, as they thought best, paying only the customary wages to the workmen. He ordered that no governor, or any other officer whatsoever, should do the English, or their servants, any wrong. In case any dispute should arise between the English and the people of the country, the matter should be brought before the Nawab at the Court at Malkandy and decided by him in durbar. This license was given on the third of May and officially sealed on the fifth. The next day the King entertained the three Englishmen at a great

banquet, and two days later they took their leave of the Court of Malkandy.

"The ninth of *May*, we gathered together all our things, and at night we departed from *Coteke*. The tenth, at the hour of two in the afternoon, we came to the town of *Harharrapoore*, and hosted in the house of our interpreter. The eleventh day we went to the governor of the town and shewed him our *fermand*, or commission from the king: the governor made a great *salame*, or court'sy, in reverence unto it, and promised his best assistance and help in anything that he could do; and there the said governor had a small present given to him. The twelfth day of *May*, Mr. *Thomas Colley* came to us at *Harharrapoore*, and the rest of the Englishmen with him, with all the goods; then we hired a house for the present, till such time as our's might be built, for our further occasions to the company's use.

"This town of *Harharrapoore* is very full of people, and it is in bounds six or seven miles in compass; there are many merchants in it and great plenty of all things: here is also cloth of all sorts, great store, for there do belong to this town at least three thousand weavers, that are housekeepers, besides all other that do work, being bound or hired.

"The fourteenth day, the two merchants went abroad, and found out a plot of land fitting to build upon; then they laid the king's *deroy*[4] on it and seized upon it for the company's use; and there was no man that did or durst gainsay them for doing the same. The fifteenth day they hired workmen and labourers to measure the ground and to square out the foundation of the house and likewise for the wall, which was one hundred conets square, which is fifty yards, every conet being half a yard or a foot and a half; and it behoved us to make haste for the time of the great rains was at hand. The sixteenth day they laid the foundation of the walls, being nine feet thick: much haste was made and many workmen about it; but this our first work was but labour lost and cast away, for it came to nothing. For on the eighteenth day the rains began with such force and violence that it beat down all our work to the ground and washed it away as if there had not been anything done: this storm continued with-

[4] Fryer says that *deroy* "is a prohibition in the King's name for anyone to have anything to do with them till that be taken off."

out ceasing (day and night), more or less, three weeks complete. The sixteenth day of *June* Mr. *Ralph Cartwright* took his journey for *Ballazary*, and two *Englishmen* with him who were *Edward Peteford* and *William Withall*, and from thence he was minded to travel further into the country of *Bengalla*."

Meanwhile the Council at Masulipatam had not forgotten their mission to Orissa. The good ship *Swan*, under the command of Edward Austin, had recently arrived from England, and by a consultation held on the 27th June, it was decided that she and all her cargo, with Mr. Bannister and Mr. Littler, two new factors, should be sent on to Bengal to discover the condition and prospects of the trade in those parts, and to effect a permanent settlement. There were many reasons to be given for this decision. "Ffirst, for the trade 'twixt that and this place [Masulipatam], in Rice, Sugar, Butter, and divers other sorts of Provisions and course Commodities. Secondly it affords Store of white cloths at Cheape Prices, such as is Suitable for England, Persia, and the Southwards . . . .Besides it yealdes good Store of exceeding good powder Sugar[5] which Costs not there above two-pence halfe-penny the English pound with all charges aboard. As much of this commodity as may be got timely enough for Persia we intend for that place by the *Discovery*. Gumlacke vppon stickes is there to be had very Cheape, and is much required, as well for Macassar and Persia as for England . . . . . .Silke may there be bought likewise yearely to a great summe at 4 *in* 5 *fanams* the English pound. . . . . Divers other things it affords for Persia, as *Shashes*, Stuffes, *Allyjahs*, fine Chite cloths, and the like. Some whereof is now in Action for that place, and our Better experience will doubtless Bringe the rest Also within the compass of our future investments."

On the 22nd of July, the *Swan* anchored off Harshapur and fired three guns; but as the English were all inland at Harapur she got no answer. Having waited all night they weighed anchor in the morning and went on to Ballasore where they met Mr. Cartwright.

So far all had gone well with the English. But difficulties now began to arise in various directions. The new comers were quite

[5] They do not appear to have thought so highly of this commodity at home. In September 1660, the Court gave orders not to purchase any more Bengal sugars for the future.

ignorant of the commercial needs of the people of Bengal. The goods brought out by the *Swan* were not of the right sort. She was chiefly laden with broadcloth and lead, but there was no demand for these commodities in Bengal, and so the whole of the cargo lay at Ballasore for nearly a year without being sold. Neither the merchants nor the common sailors understood the necessity for severe self-restraint and temperance in these Eastern regions. The place abounded with fruit and arack, and these when taken in excess produced the most lamentable consequences. The twenty-fifth of August, in the morning, Mr. Thomas Colley died of fever at Harharapore, and on the 17th October, John Poule, purser, of the *Swan*, who had been sent from Ballasore to take poor Colley's place, writes to Cartwright in the following depressed strain. "Your opinion of sending A man to Gugernat *Et setera* places, there to procure cloth would very well become our implyment had we but on home we might truste in that bissines, but you well know the fallsity and desaytfullness of our new implyed servants is such that we Durst not depose confidence in them to the vallew of 10 *roopees*. Our servant Nirana cannot be well spared from this place. I doo, therefoore, my Sellfe intend so farr as I can gett musters of *Cussayes* which are now A making to Leave the oversight of this place vnto William Bruton and the broker, and A dress my Sealfe for the greate pogodo, there soposing Likewise to put ofe part such marchandise as heere Lyeth ded on our hands. The market of Saylls in Harrapore seimes at present as if there were no marchantes in the Contry Those Portingalls whilome exspelled from Hvgly have found greate favor with Shawgahan and re-entered that place to the number of 20 persones hows Cavidall for their commensing A new investment is the third part of there goods formerly cessed on which with Large priveliges and *tashareefes* with honor, the kinge hath bestowed on them so that our expectation of Hugly is frustrayt and I feare likewise Pippely will be (not?) obtained beeing A convenient Randyvoes of theirs wherefor som parsones have Latly complained to this Nabob of our seeking to put them from that porte; have Answered we entended no Svch mater but only for Bollasary or Harssapoore, so with good *delassa* they were dismissed."

Altogether in 1633 five of the six factors of the Bay fell victims to the climate A large number of the *Swan's* men were visited with

sickness, and the *Thomas*, which was sent on after her, buried four men, and returned with the greater portion of her crew dangerously ill. The place soon acquired a bad name amongst the English, and its unhealthiness was one of the most serious obstacles in the way of their progress. The hand of man was also against them. The Aracanese pirates haunted the Bay, and, when the *Swan* was in Bengal in 1633, some of them suddenly attacked her boat as it was being sent ashore for water, killed three of her men and carried off the rest to Pipli. The English also had to meet the opposition of the Portuguese, who in spite of recent reverses still retained a hold on the trade of the country, and the still worse opposition of the Dutch who claimed sovereignty over the places within their limits, and excluded the English even from stations recognised to belong to them by existing treaties. Owing to these various difficulties Cartwright was unable to do more than make settlements at Harapore and Ballasore. All hope of fresh establishments at Jagannath or Pipli had to be abandoned. Even the factory, which Cartwright had established at Harapore, and of which he remained for some time the chief, fell into decay, for as the river where the vessels used to lie gradually silted up, it became unsafe for ships to ride there and difficult to send goods by sea that way.

The expulsion of the Portuguese from Hijili in 1636, and the consequent ruin of Pipli, offered fresh opportunities for developing the trade of the Bay; but the English were not at the moment in a position to avail themselves of them. It had been more than once pointed out to the Court, that if it wished to succeed in Bengal, it must send out an additional number of properly qualified factors and writers, and secure two or three small pinnaces as coasters, such as the Dutch had, of 80 or 120 tons, drawing little water, and carrying twelve or fourteen guns a-piece. But in spite of urgent appeals neither men nor boats ever came. Indeed the Company's affairs were too much embarassed to allow them to attend to such matters. In India, on the Coromandel Coast, in spite of specious promises and golden firmans, their trade was hampered and restricted in every direction by the jealous rivalry of the Dutch and the vexatious oppression of the officers of the King of Golconda. At home they had to struggle for

very life with an Association formed in 1635 under the immediate patronage of Charles I, by Sir William Courten, for fitting out ships and sending merchandise to the East Indies. It was not till 1639 that the King was induced to revoke Courten's license on the condition that a fourth joint stock should be formed, and that greater efforts should be made to prosecute and develop the Eastern trade. For this purpose it was absolutely necessary that some station should be found on the Coromandel Coast, better suited than Armagon, to protect the trade, and Mr. Francis Day, one of the Council of Masulipatam, having been sent to examine the country, near the Portuguese settlement of St. Thomé, reported strongly in favour of Madrasapatam. Accordingly, in 1640, the English here laid the foundation of Fort St. George, and established their first independent station in India.

A new impetus was given to the Company's trade. In 1641 Bengal seemed of so little consequence that the ship *Dyamond* was sent thither to pay off debts and fetch away the factors; but in the very next year this policy of withdrawal was reversed. Francis Day came to Ballasore in the autumn on a visit of inspection. He found the factory at Harapore on the point of dissolution. Only a few "Cassaes" and "Sannoes" were in preparation. Of the three factors then in the Bay, Yard and Trauell intended to return to Europe. Only Hatch would remain, and he was much discontented as his contracted time had expired and he expected to get but little employment. But the quick insight which had selected Madras for the head-quarters of the coast trade, here too enabled Day to discern the commercial advantages of a station at Ballasore. The port had rapidly improved during the past eight years. The bar at the mouth of the river had oponed, and the river itself proved much better than had been supposed; the road was safe, and the Harapore cloth could be easily transported thither by land. Day, therefore, was strongly in favour of retaining the station at Ballasore and of supporting it by ample supplies of men, money and goods. "Accordinge to that small time of my being heer," he wrote, "and that little observation that I have taken, I think Ballasara with the adjacent places is not to bee totally left, for it is no such dispisable place as is voted, it being an opulent Kingdome and you haveing bin already at great chargos in gaininge

the free Custome of all Sorts of Goods, believe it if you had but an Active man, two or three in these parts, you would find it very profitable provided you double Stocke the Coast, without which it is impossible to comply to your desires. Since I have knowen these parts, for the most parte you have had servants and little or noe meanes to imploy them, if you should inlarge your trade, you may happely have meanes and noe servants, especially such that should know how to imploy it to best advantage." Day's recommendation was no doubt carried into effect, and the Company's servants, including the faithful Narayan, concentrated at Ballasore, for we find that in 1644 there were in those regions three factors, Henry Olton, William Gurney and William Netland, of whom Olton was the chief. Yet the English had little faith in Day's judgment. They shook their heads when they thought of the future of Bengala, and referred the whole matter to the Court in London for decision.

4291